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(2020) *Vetusta Monumenta*; Volume 2, Plate 5: View of the Savoy from the Thames. Society of Antiquaries of London.

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## Plate 2.5: View of the Savoy from the Thames

- Plate

**Plate:**



([http://scalar.missouri.edu/~dzi/vm2005/dzc\\_output.dzi](http://scalar.missouri.edu/~dzi/vm2005/dzc_output.dzi)) Engraved by George Vertue (1684–1756) in 1750 after his own drawing, originally made in 1736 (Alexander 2008, 383). Vertue began exhibiting his series of drawings of this site on 9 November 1749 (SAL Minutes VI.9) and showed the drawing on which this plate is based, with a somewhat different inscription of his own, on 14 December (16). On 5 July 1750, “Mr. V. President [James] West made a motion, that as that place is likely soon to be rebuilt, this old state of it would do very well to be continued by a Print” (51) and the motion passed at the next meeting (52). On 25 April 1751 Vertue delivered the proof (94) and prints were distributed on 23 May (103). The remaining drawings from this series were engraved as Plate 2.12 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate12-savoy-hospital>) (1753) and Plate 2.14 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate14-plan-of-the-savoy>) (1754).

- Object

**Object:**

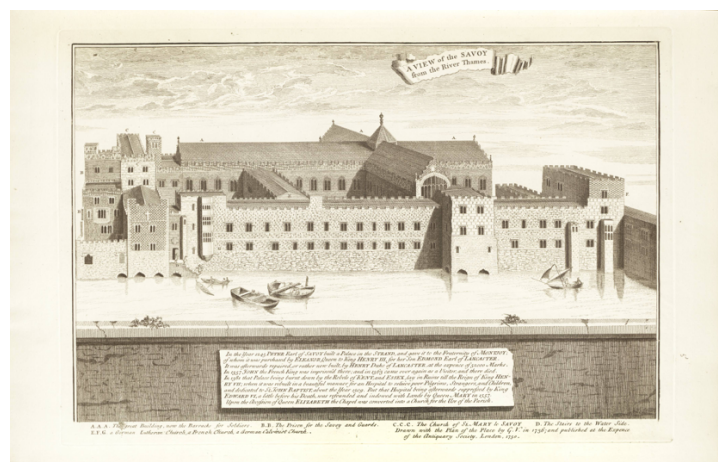


Plate 2.5 of *Vetusta Monumenta* is the first of three depictions of the Savoy engraved for volume two of the series. This plate presents a picturesque view of the Savoy Hospital from across the river Thames and constitutes a visual record of the building as it stood in 1736, before it was almost completely lost to fire and demolition in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Engraving by George Vertue after his own drawings. 463 x 314 mm. Published

by the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1750. Current location: The only surviving building of the Savoy Hospital is the Hospital Chapel, now The Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, in London, UK.

(<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/media/vm2-05.jpg>) The plate delineates a number of buildings forming the Savoy Hospital dedicated in 1509 to St. John the Baptist and rebuilt in the very early sixteenth century following orders from Henry VII. By 1736, these buildings had taken on numerous other functions, including barracks, a prison, churches, private dwellings, a warehouse, and the King's printing press. The vast majority of these buildings were destroyed by fire in 1776; any remaining fragments were swept away after 1816 to make way for the approach to Waterloo Bridge that crosses the Thames and links Victoria Embankment with the South Bank. The only surviving building from this complex as recorded by Vertue in 1736 is the Hospital Chapel, seen on the top left of the plate, identified as C. This is now The Queen's Chapel of the Savoy.

- Transcription

### Transcription:

#### *Upper Banner*

A VIEW of the SAVOY from the River Thames.

#### *Plate Caption*

In the Year 1245 PETER Earl of SAVOY built a Palace in the STRAND, and gave it to the Fraternity of MONTJOY; of whom it was purchased by ELEANOR, Queen to King HENRY III, for her Son EDMOND Earl of LANCASTER. It was afterwards repaired, or rather new built, by HENRY Duke of LANCASTER, at the expence of 52000 Marks. In 1357 JOHN the French King was imprison'd there; and in 1363 came over again as a Visitor, and there died. In 1381 that Palace being burnt down by the Rebels of KENT, and ESSEX, lay in Ruins till the Reign of King HENRY VII; when it was rebuilt in a beautiful manner for an Hospital to relieve poor Pilgrims, Strangers, and Children, and dedicated to St. JOHN BAPTIST, about the Year 1509. But that Hospital being afterwards suppressed by King EDWARD VI, a little before his Death, was refounded and indowed with Lands by Queen MARY in 1557. Upon the Accession of Queen ELIZABETH the Chapel was converted into a Church for the Use of the Parish.

#### *Key*

A.A.A. The great Building, now the Barracks for Soldiers.

B.B. The Prison for the Savoy and Guards.

C.C.C. The Church of St. Mary le Savoy

D. The Stairs to the Water Side.

E.F.G. a German Lutheran Church, a French Church, a German Calvinist Church.

Drawn with the Plan of the Place by G[eorge].V[ertue]. in 1736; and published at the Expence of the Antiquary Society, London, 1750.

- Commentary

**Commentary by Peter N. Lindfield:** Vertue's three-dimensional rendering of the Savoy buildings on the banks of the river Thames is unusual compared with the four plates preceding it in the second volume of *Vetusta Monumenta* (Peltz 2003). It is a realistic depiction of built architectural heritage, whereas the earlier plates in the volume are of plans for the rebuilding of London after the 1666 fire (Plates 2.1-2 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate19-seal-and->

mantelpiece)), a portrait (Plate 2.3 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate3-george-holmes-portrait>)), and deeds and seals (Plate 2.4 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate4-ancient-deeds-and-seals>)). Some realistic, “ (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\_1880-1113-1396)topographical” plates had appeared in the first volume of *Vetusta Monumenta*, including, for example, the endangered Tudor Gates at Whitehall and King Street (Plates 1.17–1.18 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol1plates17-19-king-street-and-whitehall-gates>)) that are rendered in perspective, and the medieval crosses at Winchester (Plate 1.61 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol1plate61-winchester-cross>)) and Chichester (Plate 1.64 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol1plate64-chichester-cross>)), both of which are rendered with figures and the latter with houses and streets. This representation of the Savoy is actually the first of a number of plates in the second volume of *Vetusta Monumenta* to represent historic English architecture in perspective, but unlike some of these other plates—such as Doncaster Cross (Plate 2.10 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate10-doncaster-cross>)), also by Vertue—this engraving renders the Savoy buildings’ perspective in a largely convincing manner.

An important aspect of Vertue’s plate is the use of *trompe-l’oeil* effects to further enhance the engraving’s sense of depth beyond the clear sense of recession created by the buildings’ architecture. Notable examples are the parapet, or wall, found at the very foreground of the image, upon which the plate’s inscription is printed within a cartouche. The dropped shadow beneath and to the left of the cartouche implies that it is a raised surface, an effect that is confirmed by its different, lighter surface treatment compared with the brick wall behind. This effect is further enhanced by the cartouche’s intentionally ragged right edge implying that it is a piece of paper, a plaque, or a fragmentary piece of plaster. Another device enhancing the plate’s illusion of depth is its title, “A VIEW of the SAVOY from the River Thames,” written on what appears to be a banderole, or banner, suspended in air and fluttering in the wind.

Whilst Vertue’s plate is clearly concerned with depicting the architectural fabric of the Savoy on the banks of the River Thames in London, the complex of buildings is depicted in a picturesque, bucolic manner in the tradition of landscape art. Notable examples of such extraneous picturesque content are the sailing vessels and barges on the Thames, the three figures depicted at point D on the stairs down to the river, the foliage and cracks on the top of the parapet, and the cloudscape representing the sky. These are all entirely unnecessary to the detailed recording of the Savoy; however, they place and contextualize the structure within Georgian society and the physical world, and not some abstract, antiquarian context.

The plate is actually consistent with the established traditions of antiquarian vistas that locate historic buildings within landscapes; perhaps the most significant are the engravings produced by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck and issued in parts between 1726 and 1739 as *Perspective Views of the Ruins of the Most Noted Abbeys and Castles of England*, which were brought together and published as *A Collection of Engravings of Castles, and Abbeys in England* in 1739. Their emphasis upon picturesque effect, rather than on the precise rendering of architectural detail, can be seen in many of their plates, such as *Haverfordwest Priory, Pembrokeshire* and the preparatory drawing ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1886-1012-506](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1886-1012-506)) in the British Museum, and also in Plates 1.9-12 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol1plates9-12-fountains-abbey>), engraved by Vertue after the Bucks’ drawings in 1722. While his view of the Savoy shares this emphasis to some degree, Vertue is clearly interested in preserving and depicting the architectural details of the Savoy beyond the more general, picturesque nature of the Bucks’ engravings.

Vertue’s engraving of the Savoy is far more detailed than two earlier examples: a rare, much smaller

print by Wenceslaus Hollar (<https://www.rct.uk/collection/803107/the-savoy-london>) (1607–77) from 1650, of which a copy is preserved in the Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, and an anonymous watercolour with a later handwritten title, “The Savoy from the Thames 1647” ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1880-1113-1396](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1880-1113-1396)),” currently in the British Museum. There are notable differences between the buildings depicted in the watercolor and the engravings by Vertue and Hollar, particularly in relation to the architectural features of the Savoy’s façade facing the Thames, including the number and position of bastions, a balustrade on one of the towers, and an oriel-type projection. These latter two features are absent from Vertue’s engraving, but they are also absent from a later engraved view of the Savoy from 1792 ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1880-1113-1395-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1880-1113-1395-1)), by which time significant changes to the complex’s waterfront façade had been undertaken. Vertue’s plate, consequently, appears as an accurate record of the Savoy in the midst of a transition between its mid seventeenth-century form and that recorded in 1792.

The Savoy was badly damaged by fire in 1776, and a large amount of it was rendered unusable; the destruction can be seen especially on the western-most tower of the 1792 engraving ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1880-1113-1395-1](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1880-1113-1395-1)). Numerous drawings and watercolors were made of its ruinous remains. Major examples include an etching ([https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1880-1113-2878](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1880-1113-2878)) by John Carter (1748–1817), an antiquary and topographical artist for the Society of Antiquaries of London; a watercolor by Thomas Girtin (1775–1802), *The Ruins of the Chapel in the Savoy Palace, London* ([https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per\\_page/25/offset/0/sort\\_by/relevance/object/46954](https://collections.ashmolean.org/collection/search/per_page/25/offset/0/sort_by/relevance/object/46954)) (c. 1795–1796), now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; and numerous sketches by J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851), including *The Ruins of the Savoy Palace* (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-girtin-the-ruins-of-the-savoy-palace-d36498>) (c. 1794–1798) and *The Interior of the Ruins of the Savoy Chapel* (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-girtin-london-the-interior-of-the-ruins-of-the-savoy-chapel-d36523>) (c. 1796), both of which are now in the Tate Britain. Any remaining fragments were swept away beginning in 1816 to make way for the approach to Waterloo Bridge, which crosses the Thames and links Victoria Embankment with the South Bank. These subsequent events make Vertue’s images of the Savoy buildings the most important record of the historic complex of buildings to be published. The only surviving building from this complex recorded by Vertue in 1736 is the Hospital Chapel, seen on the top left of the plate, identified as C. This is now The Queen’s Chapel of the Savoy and Grade II\* listed by Historic England, having itself been damaged by fire in 1860 and restored in an ancient Gothic style by Sydney Smirke (1797–1877).

So why record the Savoy? The building was of historic interest to antiquaries; this is something that the plate’s caption records and explains. The original palace on the site was built by Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, in 1245, and it was given subsequently by Henry III to Peter of Savoy (1203–1268), the uncle of his queen: it is from Peter of Savoy that the palace and the later buildings on this site took their names (Somerville 1960). Thomas Pennant (1726–1798) records that it was granted to Savoy “to hold to him and his heirs, yielding yearly at the exchequer three barbed arrows for all services” (Pennant 1813, 200). After Savoy bestowed it upon the Fraternity of Montjoy, it was purchased by his niece, the queen, Eleanor of Provence (1223–1291), who in turn bestowed it upon her son, Edmund ‘Crouchback’ (1245–96), first Earl of Lancaster and first Earl of Leicester. The Savoy then passed to the Earl of Lancaster’s second son, Henry of Lancaster (c. 1280–1345), third Earl of Lancaster and third Earl of Leicester, who re-built it in a magnificent manner. With the confinement of John, King of France, at the Savoy in 1356 after he was taken prisoner at the battle of

Poitiers, the site and the building gained considerable historic interest. Walter “Wat” Tyler (d. 1381), leader of the Peasants’ Revolt, destroyed the Savoy Palace in 1381, venting his anger towards its great owner, John of Gaunt (1340–1399), Duke of Aquitaine and Duke of Lancaster.

The outline of the Savoy as depicted in Vertue’s plate dates back to the Savoy’s re-founding and re-building as a hospital by Henry VII for the care of one hundred “distressed” people. His will made provisions for the Savoy Hospital, namely:

to doo and execute vi out of the vii works of pitie and mercy, by meanes of keping, susteynyng, and mayntenynge of commun hospitallis; wherein if thei be duly kept, the said nede pouer people bee lodged, viseted in their sicknesses, refresshed with mete and drinke, and if nede be with clothe, and also buried, yf thei fourtune to die within the same; for lack of them, infinite nombre of pouer nede people miserably daillie die, no man putting hande of helpe or remedie. (Pennant 1813, 201)

Letters Patent were issued in 1512 by Henry VIII to continue the hospital’s establishment and dedication as a corporate body to the honour of the Blessed Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and St John the Baptist (Stanford 2015). This corporate body, headed by a Master, had the ability to acquire land and build the hospital building, which was made in the form of a cross. Having been suppressed again by Elizabeth I, the Hospital changed function. By 1736 these buildings had taken on numerous other functions, including barracks, a prison, churches, private dwellings, a warehouse, and the King’s printing press.

Vertue’s plate, consequently, records the Savoy’s state in the early eighteenth century, and preserves a building of immense historical value and reputation, which now is almost entirely lost. He made several more drawings on the same occasion in 1736 and these were published as Plates 2.12 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate12-savoy-hospital>) and 2.14 (<https://scalar.missouri.edu/vm/vol2plate14-plan-of-the-savoy>) of *Vetusta Monumenta*.

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